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# Iannone, Carol: News Articles (1991): Speech 01

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7/25/91

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On the Nomination and Rejection of Carol Iannone

When President Bush nominated Carol Iannone for a seat on the National Council on the Humanities, the Modern Language Association, American Council of Learned Societies, and several other academic organizations objected to the nomination because she failed to meet the statutory standard that NEH council members "have established records of distinguished service and scholarship or creativity." For more than a decade, many in the academic community had been concerned about a general decline in the quality of the NEH council nominees. The opposition to Dr. Iannone was seen as symbolic. With nine vacancies on the council looming in 1992, it was felt that failure to respond to scholarly qualifications as meager as Dr. Iannone's would preclude objections down the road. Within days of the first objection to the nomination, the administration has sought to discredit our opposition, claiming that any and all objection was political. It should be noted here that the administration subsequently nominated two political scientists Michael Malbin and Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. for seats on the council. Both have political views very similar to Dr. Iannone -- both were confirmed as Dr. Iannone was reject -- neither was opposed by the groups opposing Dr. Iannone.

Although the Washington Post has gone to some lengths to minimize the importance of the National Council on the Humanities -- its

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members and its role -- in two editorials on the nomination and rejection of Carol Iannone for a seat on the council, the Post nonetheless has provided its readers with a rather heavy dose of opinion pieces on the matter. With the exception of Richard Cohen's very balanced assessment of the issues involved, the opinion pieces by Evans and Novak, Nat Hentoff (2), Charles Krauthammer (rather unbelievably juxtaposing the Iannone and Clarence Thomas nominations) have all rather uncritically offered the administration's position that all opposition to the nomination is just political correctness or politics. The Post has also found space for pieces by Lynne Cheney and Carol Iannone. When combined with the balanced and rather extensive news reporting of Charles Trueheart and Kim Masters, one must conclude that despite its own editorials, the Post in fact assigns rather high priority to this issue.

The intensive campaign of the Iannone defenders since the nomination was rejected appears to be succeeding in reframing the issue in public in the terms of political correctness -- a strategy that did not work with the majority of Senate committee members. I write so that the actual views and motivation of the academic opponents are not lost:

On the importance of the NEH Council: Critics of our opposition (including the Post) say that too much has been made of the issue because NEH's council has little power or importance. Senator Kassebaum, speaking in behalf of Dr. Iannone at last week's

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hearing, gave the game away "She might not meet the criteria, but I don't know that any great calamity is going to happen at the National Endowment for the Humanities." Regrettably, I would concur that the council has become less influential over the last decade but that was the heart of our opposition. Council members play an important role in both the grant review process and the development of the guidelines that set the rules for application for what is by far the most important source of funds for humanities work in the U.S. While the NEH chairman does have the power to overrule the council, it is a power all chairmen including Mrs. Cheney use judiciously and infrequently. In practice, the chairmen seek to persuade the council to reverse peer panel decisions with which they disagree. Hence, our interest in council members with the stature and independence who are more resistant to manipulation. In short, we want a council comprised of experienced, knowledgeable, independent-minded individuals with a commitment to the humanities drawn from both the scholarly and public spheres. Carol Iannone does not fit the bill.

On a category of "public intellectual" - In response to our complaints that Ms. Iannone's qualifications as a scholar are extraordinarily weak, Mrs. Cheney in her role as administration point person, progressed through a variety of claims as to what qualifications Dr. Iannone would bring to the council: First, as a distinguished scholar (easily refuted by examining her record; Second, as a distinguished teacher of undergraduates (which

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didn't work too well as an argument since Ms. Iannone has worked as an adjunct teacher in a special program outside the regular undergraduate program at NYU. Adjunct teachers rarely, if ever, participate in the departmental and institutional decisions that affect curriculum, faculty appointments and promotions, and course development); and finally, as a public intellectual -- the descriptor in use immediately prior to the vote. The administration's argument was that the nominee should be considered as a representative of the public humanities -- a "public intellectual" defined as being somewhere between the scholarly and public representatives called for in the legislation. My colleagues and I believe that adding such a new category blurs a useful distinction. An individual like Dr. Iannone, with a PhD and employed by a university would be perceived as a scholarly member of the council. In any event, Dr. Iannone has no record of leadership in public humanities -- not in New York City, New York State, nor nationally.

On Carol Iannone's credentials - Carol Iannone does not have a distinguished record as a scholar or as a public intellectual. Data from the Arts and Humanities Citation Index and the Social Sciences Citation Index confirm this. From 1981 to 1990, Dr. Iannone's publications were cited by other writers and scholars a total of 8 times, while the two other NEH council nominees were cited in a very distinguished range: Michael Malbin 232 times, and Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. 164 times. As Mrs. Chenev often has mentioned on the air, Dr. Iannone has three degrees (BA, MA, and

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PhD). These are the standard qualification for college teachers. The kind of distinction required by the legislation comes with recognized achievements in scholarly or artistic work.

Finally, in closing, I must point to the irony that Dr. Iannone's defenders apparently find no dissonance in accusing us on the one hand of marching to a political correctness tune, while simultaneously insisting that our opposition is because, to quote Senator Moynihan "She is Italian, Catholic ethnic with a working-class background."